

OSMAN DIGNA, TERROR OF THE SOUDAN, IS CAPTIVE AT LAST.

Remarkable Career of the Proselyte Mohammedan
Who Erected a Desert Empire Under the
Shadow of the Mahdi's Power.



Osman Digma at the Head of a Dervish Army.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Osman Digma captured!
How the big blacks of the Soudan must have rolled their white eyes when that news came! The tribesmen of the Saharan sands and the followers of the Egyptian khedive have never found a word in Arabic great enough to fit Osman Digma. They have called him variously Ali, Abubeker, Emir, Kober. He was the last man in England's side where Egypt is concerned. Lord Kitchener's work at Omdurman remained incomplete because Osman Digma had been neither killed nor captured.

The man's real name was George Nisbet. His father, according to the story now familiar, had taken wife and son to Egypt when the latter was yet a boy. The elder Nisbet died. The widow married a rich man of Alexandria—Osman Digma. The stepfather gave the boy his name, his education and his calling. Thus the new Osman Digma became a Mohammedan, a slave trader and a Haman of the desert.

Slavery in Egypt is nominally abolished. In reality, it flourishes. When the old Osman Digma died the new Osman Digma sat in the Berber country. Here he hired a band of lawless desert dwellers, who swept up and down the banks of the Nile, capturing young men and women. The captives were hurried down the Red Sea and sold. Osman Digma grew rich. His headquarters were at Berber and at Khartoum. The whole Soudan region yielded tribute to his traffic.

The English occupation threatened him with ruin. The new authorities had based an edict against slavery. They closed the ports of the south to the powerful merchant of Osman Digma. He was now a typical Mohammedan of 50, with a harem and a beard. Ruin stared him in the face. He joined the Mahdi.

His Appearance in the War.

The Mahdi detected the greatness of the new follower. He gave him letters to the village sheikhs and to the officials of his barbarian government, Osman Digma. In 1898, was comparatively unknown beyond the desert. Within its limits a motley population feared him. His first work was to organize a following of desert bandits. Their bond of union was plunder. Within a few years he had become the leader of the revolting population of the Eastern Soudan.

With his horde of the desert he appeared before Sinkat. This was in August, 1898. He rushed upon the settlement at the head of his force, only to be beaten back with a loss of eighty men. His following and his influence melted away. The man's satellites had been taught to deem him invincible. He was now a broken idol. The English dismissed him from their minds. His army became one of seventy-five soldiers.

In this extremity he dealt the blow that first gave the British their measure of the man. In a debate between Sinkat and Sinkat he lay all one October night with the few who still believed in him. He knew that a little detachment of native troops under a native commander must pass that way. He enjoined absolute silence upon his force. They hid behind sand hills and the bare rock masses. Osman Digma threatened with death any man who moved before he gave the word. When the enemy had involved themselves in the dells the slave dealer's signal came. Out rushed the men from their concealment. The enemy were almost annihilated, and all of Osman Digma's lost prestige returned to him.

Victory After Victory.

Four more splendid victories over the Government forces followed in quick succession. The British found to their amazement that this outlawed slave trader was a General. In six months he had made himself master of the country round about. His army grew like a field of wheat. He drilled and disciplined his desert horde as Hannibal had drilled and disciplined the Carthaginian mob.

The dilemma of the English was extreme. They retrieved their almost fatal mistake of

having underrated the foe by sending General Graham's army against him. Before the Englishman could take the field Tokar had fallen. To understand the situation the geography of the region must be known. Tokar is just off the Red Sea in the Soudan country. A short distance away lies Teb, a verdant oasis fertilized by Inxhamitla springs. The town of Teb had been invested by Osman with 400 Arabs. He deprived the inhabitants of food and water. His ammunition was exhausted. Osman kept up a hot artillery and infantry fire. His plan of campaign was perfect. The Governor of the town had made up his mind to hold out to the last. He expected the British. The inhabitants were terrified. They knew the character of the enemy and they feared his fury. At last the Governor had to yield. He surrendered his fort and his troops surrendered their arms.

A Disregarded Summons.

General Graham was dumfounded. His first act was to send messengers to Osman Digma demanding submission. This communication the Mohammedan did not deem it prudent to notice. He simply threw up breastworks in the oasis and waited for Graham to come up. The latter lost no

time. With Baker Pasha and Colonel Burghley to guide him, General Graham arrived at Teb in four hours. He had about 400 men. Osman Digma's force approached 400, almost wholly Soudanese. He began the battle by shelling the advancing column of British. No answer was made until Graham had conducted his men quite around the breastworks. Then he opened with artillery and infantry attack. The Soudanese staggered under the shock. The English rushed upon their enemy.

The battle lasted three hours. Osman lost fully 100 men, the latterly two-thirds of his force. He was wounded. The Mohammedan fell back to Sinkat, and in two weeks had entrenched himself near that city with a new army.

The British moved upon Sinkat in squares. The advancing columns were like a long, living ladder. Osman Digma detached several small forces to harry the advancing enemy. The lathhouses and marines had been ordered to hold their fire. The English advance guard, however, persisted in firing stray volleys. This disobedience led to disaster. The line of march was hidden in the smoke of its own fire.

The Soudanese crept up beneath the shelter thus afforded. They sprang upon the English ranks and beat them back. The cowardly of the Arab, for hand-to-hand conflict served Osman Digma's purpose well. The fighting rurs fell into the hands of his men.

Carnage in the Desert.

Only the intrepidity of General Graham averted a rout. He reformed his broken lines and charged the yelling Arabs. So hot became the fire from the English artillery that the forces of Osman broke in dismay. General Graham made good all advances and forced Osman from Sinkat, but no practical advantage resulted. Osman Digma took the field again in a few weeks. Along 400 Soudanese and Arabs had fallen. On the other hand Graham had lost a fifth of his army.

These events revealed clearly the Mohammedan's plan of campaign. The loss of life was of no importance to Osman Digma. His men were eager to be slaughtered, that they might enter the portals of paradise. If the English won a victory he let them move in, and then harassed them from the desert. Such was his course when beaten from Sinkat. The English held the town, but Osman Digma held the English.

British policy contemplated the building of a railway from Sinkat to Berber. Before the desert could be carried out the hostile borders had to be swept from the desert. Osman Digma stood in the way. All the power of Britain was brought to bear to dislodge the Mohammedan. The effort was vain. He was driven from one stronghold only to establish a new one. After army swept down into the desert, but the country could not be cleared. By 1902 the theater of war had been transferred to Kawa. In this campaign Osman had the aid of two of his nephews—Abdullah and Fadi Digma.

Osman had performed prodigies for the Mahdi after starting the English up in Sinkat. He crossed the Egyptian border, Misra, Shendi and British tribes. These tribes afforded him levy after levy of recruits. He now demanded the surrender of both Sinkat and Sinkat, and even made an attack. In this he was repulsed. But he massacred 150 soldiers and two officers in a rocky pass not twenty miles from Sinkat.

A Maze of Wavements.
The military operations of the following months are not easily followed. The accounts are too contradictory. The news came, late in 1898, that Osman Digma had

been slain and his whole army captured. It turned out that Osman had really won a victory. He arose from the dead on June 18, 1898, on that day he appeared before Tamai with another of his innumerable armies. The English now made heroic efforts to keep the Sinkat route open. They hoped to do this by driving Osman before them. Unfortunately, he always got behind them. The proposed railway from Sinkat to Berber remained a railway on paper.

All this time the Haman of the desert had continued his slave traffic. His roving bands descended upon tribes friendly to the English and bore off their men and women. The captives were exported to Arabia and there sold. The profits netted Osman Digma a prodigious sum. Nor were the British able to put a stop to Osman's operations.

The deadlock dragged along until 1898. In that year Colonel Kitchener, as he then was, determined to deal Osman Digma a decisive blow. Kitchener was then Governor General of the Red Sea littoral. He fell upon the slave trader's camp, captured it and sent the Soudanese flying. Osman reformed his troops and retook his own camp from the rear. In the fighting Kitchener got the severe wound which has never since wholly ceased to trouble him. Osman lost

a band of slaves in this fight. He fell back to Darah with about 200 men, and won a victory over the Anahla tribesmen sent out to check him. Next he returned upon Kitchener's remnants at Haman. The Baggara horse charged the English forces and swept all before them. In the following April Osman was joined by Abu Girgeh, at the head of 3000 men.

The British, to their profound chagrin, were compelled to open negotiations with the man whom they had so lightly undertaken to subdue. Osman Digma received the emissaries at the head of his force. He listened to what they had to say, but they could not move him an inch. He declared that he would attack every armed force found within the limits of what he deemed his own territory. He was, however, disposed to allow trading within certain limits.

Playing His Own Game.

This really meant that the Mohammedan commander would do anything calculated to promote traffic in slavery. That enriched him. The English were far from satisfied. Their vessels patrolled the coast night and day. But they could not break up Osman's pet traffic. The slaves continued to be captured and exported in large numbers. The great Digma had become a bonanza of the desert. He was playing a game that meant the more to him the longer it lasted. He laughed the British power to scorn.

The man who first realized this situation was Kitchener. He saw clearly that his country was playing into the Khalifa's hands as long as the scandal of the situation in Sinkat was permitted to endure. He advocated an entire abandonment of the plan of campaign. It seems incredible now, but it is a fact that the Cabinet in London refused to entertain Kitchener's project for a reorganized military movement. I was informed by a prominent member of the Turf Club in Cairo last year that Lord Cromer threatened to resign if Kitchener were not given his way.

The history of the next few years is but a repetition of what went before. Osman Digma held his own, which was all he wanted to hold. He ran down to Omdurman, perfected his plans, sold his slaves and enriched himself. Kitchener set about his great work of organization. He now paid no particular attention to Osman. That worthy remained as elusive as the eel. Ambitious Colonels and Majors tried to capture him. Fetched battles raged.

On the whole, however, the Mohammedan slave's power declined. England was no longer playing his game. The religious influence of the Mahdist movement waned. Long before the great day at Omdurman the Soudan's fate had passed out of Osman Digma's hands. He had sunk to the level of a bandit at large within its limits.

When Kitchener went to Khartoum Osman Digma was never out of his thoughts. Positive orders were given to take the slave trader, dead or alive. But although the great Englishman started the quarry, he could not run it to earth. Osman came out of the trap alive and free. He had lost some credit in the last few years even with his own following. The events at Atbara and at Dongola revealed the slave trader in his true colors as a self-seeker.

"What news have you and how fare the faithful?" inquired Abdullah on one occasion when Osman came to Omdurman to report.

"Master," replied Digma, "I led the faithful to paradise."

"Then why did you not go with them?" retorted Abdullah.

"God," replied the slave trader, "hath not ordained it so."

The end came gloriously last week. Ever since the fall of Khartoum Osman Digma has been a hunted man. He returned to his old haunts near Tokar. Sinkat has long been partitioned by the English. The commander there, Captain Burgess, organized an expedition and ran Osman Digma to earth in the hills. The old slave trader is now under lock and key in the city he has besieged so often.



KING CUPID'S VALENTINE PROCESSION.